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Issuing a Warning

A key member of Congress has warned the nation's broadcasters not to knuckle under to Nixon administration pressure over news program content if they expect help in easing license renewal regulations.

Rep. Torbert H. Macdonald (D-Mass.) also scored the administration for playing on "natural tensions that exist between an affiliate and its network, the news centers in New York and Washington and the isolated stations many hundreds of miles away."

Macdonald is chairman of the House Subcommittee on Communication and Power, which is scheduled to hold hearings this spring on a proposed administration bill that will call for a modification of present TV and radio license rules. He made his charges in a speech prepared for delivery today before the California Broadcasters Association meeting in Palm Springs.

Macdonald warned broadcasters that "this Congress is in a rebellious mood," as the result of a "gradual erosion of the powers delegated to us by the Constitution."

"To me," Macdonald continued, "the Office of Telecommunications Policy (OTP) is a striking example of this erosion."

Clay T. Whitehead, OTP director, suggested last month that local broadcasters should be responsible for the objectivity of network news programs. At the same time, Whitehead outlined administration proposals to lengthen license renewal periods from three to five years and other changes in the Communications Act of 1934 which would ease current FCC rules in that area.

Although Whitehead has claimed that his December attack on "ideological plugola" in network news was independent of his legislative proposals, Macdonald wrote in the speech that "if the hearings and the subsequent legislative history of a license renewal bill indicate that broadcasters are willing to give away their news independence in order to please the government, I predict there will be little sympathy in my committee for your case."

Macdonald urged the licensees, however, to "continue to complain to your networks if you think they are misusing their responsibility to present the news fairly and honestly."

—*John Carmody*